

PRO_DEV-IMLER-Tranquil Teaching in the Age of Cheap Text-NOTES.ARCHIVE

session ▾

LCARS notes from the following lecture:

- Imler, Henry. "Tranquil Teaching in the Age of Cheap Text." Faculty Development Session, Fall 2025.
- Materials
 - Presentation Canvas
- LCARS Notes
 - Written Version
 - PRO_DEV-IMLER-Tranquil Teaching in the Age of Cheap Text-NOTES.ARCHIVE

Description ▾

How do you stay focused on teaching when students can simulate learning assessments with cheap text? Go backwards, of course! Using the principles of backwards design, Professor Imler shares three assignments—Cornell notes, Perusal readings, and distributed term papers—that might keep students learning regardless. (You will be asked to criticize them, so come with a red pen!) In the second half of the session will be a participant-lead discussion on course and assignment design from the point of view of Paulo Friere.

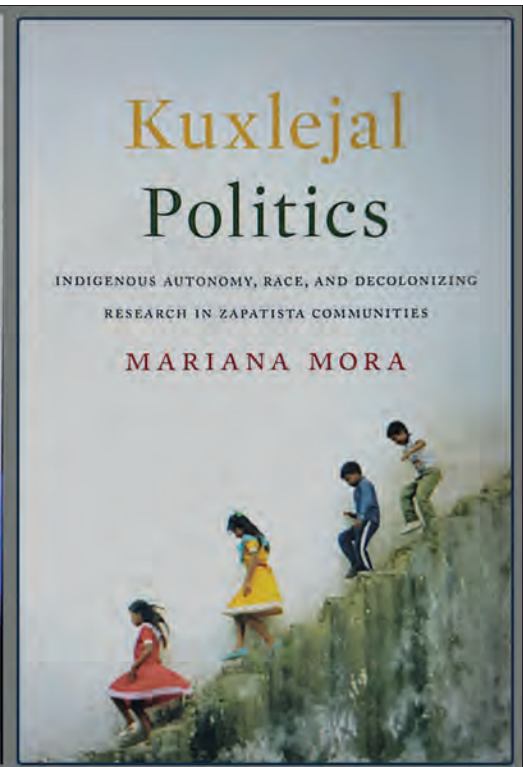
Bibliography

- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.
- Mora, Mariana. *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities*.
- **Full bibliography and handouts:**
<https://www.zotero.org/groups/6084929/foolsforbackwardsdesign/collections/JVFXLSHE>

Outline

We began the meeting discussing what purposes research serves, in what ways it can strengthen the processes one studies, and what questions one needs to ask to identify the risks, contradictions, and tensions that potentially direct research toward contrary ends. Arturo, a member of the autonomous government of Ricardo Flores Magón, in Caracol III, asked a question that directed us immediately to the heart of the matter: "And these chapters, articles, or theses, are they just to make pretty books, to get a job, and to archive in a library or in some school, or is it to *do* things? And what things can we do with them?"

To encourage us to reflect, Rockwell reminded everyone that knowledge exists not in



1. Opening Framework: The Haunting Question of Purpose

1. Zapatista Research Accountability - Indigenous community challenges to academic extraction

1. **"What can we do with them?"** - Core question from *Kuxlejal Politics* about research utility vs. academic careerism
2. **Southern Mexico autonomy movements** - Descendants of Maya who "defeated the empire" through self-governance
3. **Silent marches as liberation pedagogy** - 10,000-30,000 people walking through cities without speaking, creating interpretive space

2. Connection to Paulo Freire's Liberation Pedagogy

1. **Banking vs. Liberation models** - "I deposit info, you spit it back like a teller" versus collaborative knowledge creation
2. **False generosity critique** - Gates Foundation¹ as example of conditional giving that maintains systemic problems
3. **Humanization through praxis** - Education as dialogue toward community transformation

2. Faculty Discussion Recap - Faculty Emotional Landscape in the Age of AI

1. **Retirement as Sweet Release** - "I'm glad I can retire in 13 years" response to AI in education
2. **Cautious Optimism from Early Childhood Educators** - AI for organization, scheduling, and practical applications rather than content generation

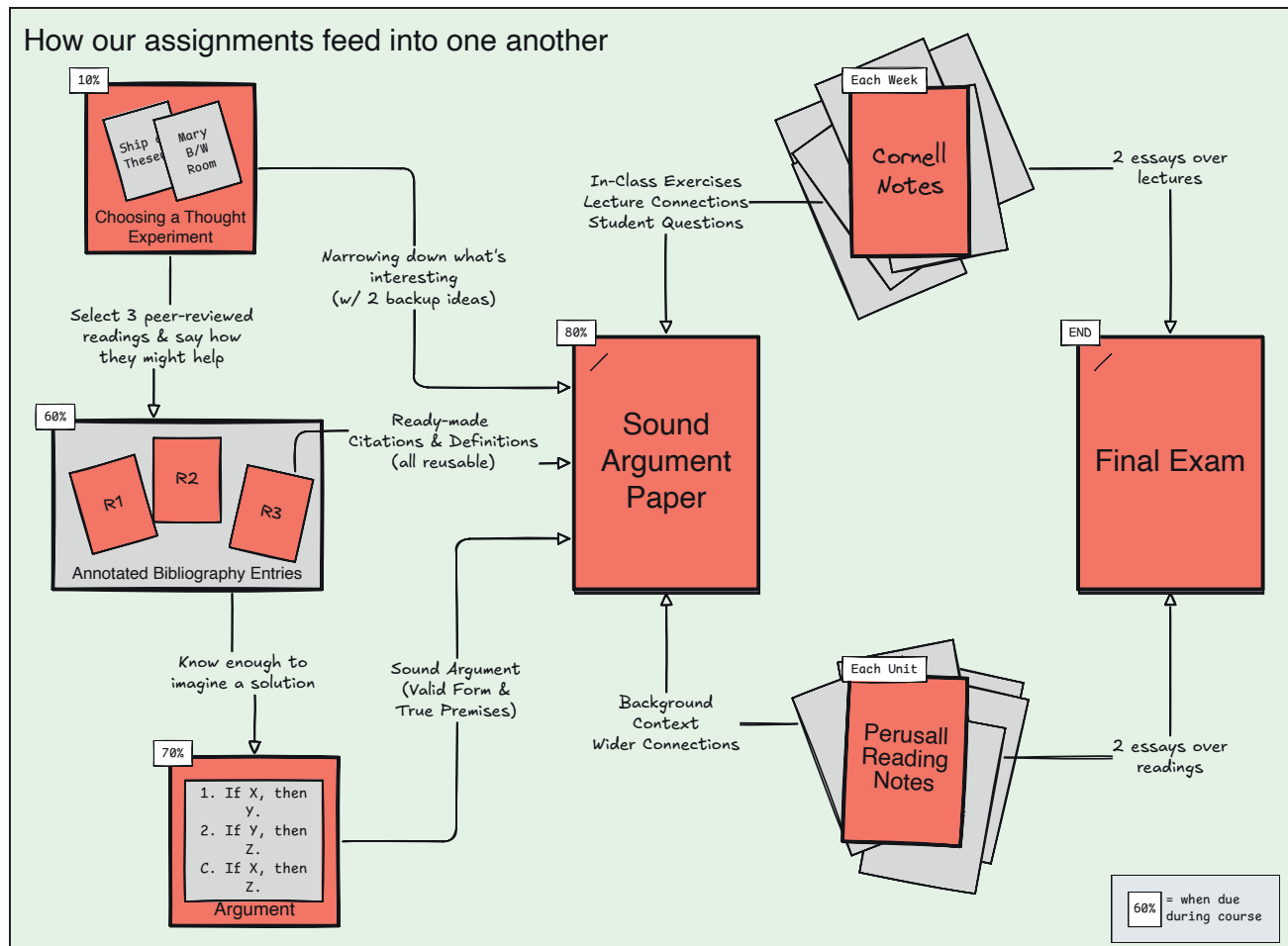
3. Student Orientation Revelations - 45-50 first-generation students looking "nervous and guilty" about AI policies

1. **George Orwell framework** - "If you cannot do your thinking for yourself, then something else is going to do the thinking for you"
2. **Course-specific AI policies** - Different objectives require different approaches across disciplines

3. The Problem of Cheap Text²

1. **DRM-free readings vulnerability** - Easy copy-paste into "simulation machines"
2. **Discussion posts as cheap text generation** - Students avoiding thinking through automated responses
3. **The Haunting Ghost** - Choice between letting AI "ruin my Gorum life" or finding pedagogical workarounds
4. **Labor implications** - Law firms coining "cheap text" term for AI-generated content lacking human thought

4. Three Assignment Solutions: Backwards Design Approach



1. Sound Argument Paper (Philosophy)

1. **Week 1: Topic Selection** - 30 thought experiments + 5 philosophical problems for student choice based on curiosity

2. **Week 2: Three Sources** - Students browse philosophical library, select readings that interest them

3. **Annotated Bibliography Assignment** - Students can "straight up use any of those sentences" since they're engaging with content and ideas

4. **Cornell Notes Integration³** - Daily lecture notes with reflection space feeding directly into paper assignments

Topic(s) _____		Name _____	
WK _____		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16	
Curious questions	Basic Lecture Notes	Questions and Problems: _____	
<i>Each lecture we will need at least</i> - one content question - one peer discussion question		<i>Critical Thinking: Questions of coherence of claims</i>	
<i>List important terms with quotes and page numbers</i> <i>Note important dates (calBP or BCE/CE)</i> <i>List important locations</i> <i>Record key ideas, concepts, and definitions</i>		Claims & Sources	Your takes & reasoning.
Connections and Implications		Assignment Connections:	
<i>What is at stake and for whom?</i> <i>Connections with lectures and other readings</i> <i>Social, personal, group, and state implications</i>		<i>Analyze claims via Toulmin method (claim, evidence, warrant, backing, rebuttal, qualifier)</i> <i>Give informed judgments on claims, problems, thought experiments, and historical interpretations</i>	
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2. Perusall for Reading Engagement

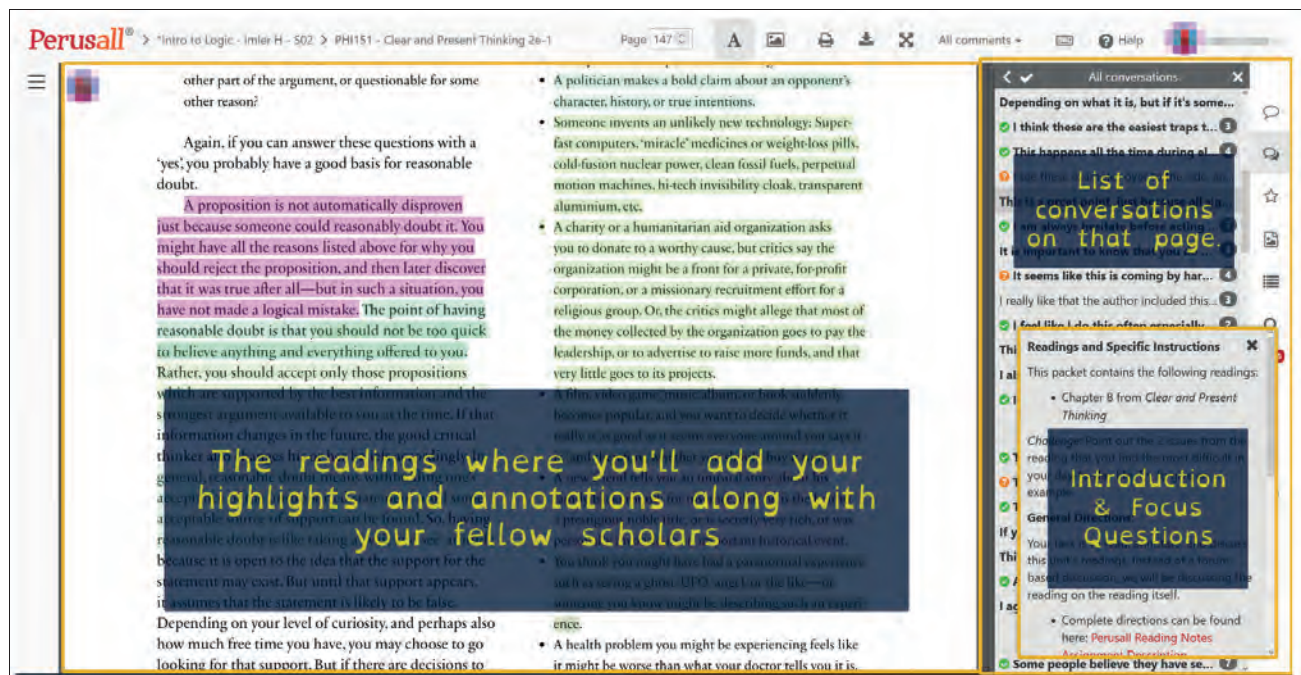


Figure 1 - Annotated screenshot of the main Perusall interface.

1. **Social annotation interface** - Text + chat integration where highlighting creates discussion opportunities
2. **"More difficult to simulate"** - Requires specific textual engagement rather than generic responses
3. **Accidental learning by osmosis** - Even students trying to fake engagement must process material
4. **Free platform model** - Revenue through textbook sales, not student fees
3. **Distributed Assessment Strategy**
 1. **Scaffolding with full revision credit** - "Revision is where some of the best learning happens"
 2. **Visible thinking at each step** - Instructor can track student development throughout process
 3. **Curiosity-driven design** - "Find something that's interesting to you" rather than generic prompts
5. **Faculty Discussion: Making Real Work Easier Than Fake**
 1. **Zines as AI-Resistant Medium**⁴ - "I tried. It does not do it" - AI cannot create effective zines
 1. **Embodied creativity** - Physical, visual, tactile elements that resist simulation
 2. **"Why would you put a zine into ChatGPT?"** - Absurdity of automating inherently personal medium
 2. **Scene Analysis Assignments** - Requiring "actual human eyeballs and attention" for film/literature work
 3. **Demonstration of AI Failures** - Powerlifting program with wrong math as concrete example of AI limitations

4. **Early Childhood Applications** - Legitimate organizational uses that enhance rather than replace professional judgment

6. Systemic Analysis: Banking vs. Liberation in AI Context

1. **Transactional vs. Meaningful Learning** - "Do you want learning as transactional or meaningful?" framework for student reflection
2. **Tools and User Competency** - "A tool is only as good as its user" when students lack domain knowledge to verify AI output
3. **Student Agency and Growth** - Safety mechanisms like optional final exams to "clean up" poor performance
4. **Focus on Reachable Students**

7. Creative Resistance and Faculty Agency

1. **What agency do we have and how can we use it well?**
2. **Lack of creative breakthroughs** - Faculty identifying need for more brainstorming and experimentation time
3. **Community Problem-Solving** - Lightning rounds and collaborative sessions for generating solutions
4. **Making Authentic Work More Appealing** - Students wanting human-created content as backlash against "AI voice reading Reddit stories with Subway Surfers"

Glossary

Term	Lecture Use	Common/Academic Use
Banking Model	Freire's oppressive education: "I deposit info, you spit it back like a teller"	Educational approach treating students as passive recipients of knowledge deposits
Cheap Text	AI-generated writing requiring zero student thinking (law firm terminology)	Low-quality, easily produced written content lacking depth or originality
Cornell Notes	Daily note-taking method with reflection space feeding into papers	Structured note-taking system with cue column, notes, and summary sections
False Generosity	Freire's term for charity maintaining oppressive systems (Gates Foundation example)	Superficial aid that preserves underlying power structures while appearing benevolent
Liberation Model	Freire's collaborative education exemplified by Zapatista question "what can we do?"	Educational approach emphasizing dialogue, critical consciousness, and transformative action

Term	Lecture Use	Common/Academic Use
Perusall	Social annotation platform making AI simulation "more difficult"	Online tool for collaborative reading with embedded discussion features
Praxis	Freire's combination of reflection and action for community transformation	Integration of theory and practice for social change
Scaffolding	Breaking large assignments into feedback-supported chunks with revision opportunities	Educational technique providing temporary support structures for learning
Zapatistas	Indigenous autonomy movement in Southern Mexico providing pedagogical model	Mexican revolutionary group promoting indigenous rights and democratic self-governance
Zines	Student publication medium that AI "cannot make well" - physical, creative resistance	Self-published magazines or pamphlets, often featuring personal/political content

Footnotes

¹ **Gates Foundation:** Philanthropic organization criticized for imposing educational reforms without consulting affected communities, exemplifying "false generosity" that maintains rather than challenges systemic inequalities.

² **Cheap Text:** Term coined by law firms to describe AI-generated content that appears professional but lacks the depth, accuracy, and critical thinking required for meaningful communication.

³ **Cornell Notes:** Note-taking method with divided page layout including notes section, cue column for questions/keywords, and summary area for reflection - designed to connect daily learning with larger assignments.

⁴ **Zines:** DIY publications emphasizing personal expression, visual creativity, and embodied production that resist automation - requiring human creativity, layout skills, and artistic sensibility that current AI cannot effectively replicate.